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MONTANA CHRISTMAS TREE EXPORTS REACH LOWEST LEVEL SINCE SURVEY WAS BEGUN IN 1942

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ABSTRACT

Authoritative data on 1963 exports of Montana Christmas trees by rail and truck show a continuous decline in shipments during the last 4 years to 2.1 million trees, the lowest recorded level. Foliage damage to potential Christmas trees by insects and diseases is considered a principal cause. Compares shipments in 1963 with those of 1962, and summarizes volumes of rail and truck shipments for the past 21 years.

Shipments of Christmas trees from Montana in 1963[1] dropped to 2.1 million trees, the lowest level recorded since the survey was begun in 1942. Shipments in 1963 represent a 6-percent decrease from 1962 numbers[2] and a 50-percent decrease from the peak year, 1956.[3]

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[1] This report deals only with shipments of trees to markets outside Montana rather than total Christmas tree production for the State. Each of the transstate railway lines supplied data for trees shipped by rail; the State Forester, the University of Montana, and the National Forests supplied figures on truck shipments.

[2] Farrenkopf, Thomas O. Montana Christmas tree exports decline for third straight year. U.S. Forest Serv. Intermountain Forest and Range Expt. Sta. Res. Note INT-7, 4 pp., illus. 1963.

[3] Wilson, Alvin K. A new high in Montana Christmas tree shipments. U.S. Forest Serv. Intermountain Forest and Range Expt. Sta. Res. Note 44, 4 pp., illus. 1957.

Exports of Christmas trees from Montana have fluctuated widely over the years. In general, shipments increased from 1942 until 1956, but have been in a rapid, general decline since that time. Large-scale foliage damage by insects in 1957 to stands of Douglas-fir--the major Christmas tree species--accompanied the beginning of this decline. Tree diseases of epidemic proportions in subsequent years over part of the range of Douglas-fir rendered additional trees unsalable.

Northern Rocky Mountain Region foresters in the principal Christmas tree producing areas feel that the persistent slump in exports results from continuing insect and disease attacks on Douglas-fir as well as from residual damage from past attacks. However, the increasing capacity of other states to produce trees in plantations for local consumption and export, in addition to sales of artificial trees, probably have made inroads in the markets for Montana trees. That this may be the trend in the future is suggested by the situation on the Kootenai National Forest. This Forest, which is one of the major Christmas tree producing areas in the State and provided 38 percent of the trees shipped by truck in 1963, reports that for that year supply exceeded demand. In the past, demand has almost always been greater than supply in that area.

Forest insects caused greater losses to Christmas tree stock on Montana's National Forests in 1963 than any of the other destructive agents. The Douglas-fir needle midge, spruce budworm, and, to a lesser extent, the Cooley spruce gall aphid continue

to reduce salability of Douglas-fir Christmas trees and to lower the quality of salable trees. The Douglas-fir needle midge remains epidemic in and around the Kootenai and Lolo National Forests, the principal harvest areas. This insect causes discoloration and disfiguration of needles, thereby making the tree unacceptable or unattractive as a Christmas tree. Spruce budworm, which, despite its name, is more widespread on Douglas-fir than spruce, is most serious on the Lolo and Bitterroot National Forests and in the Garnet Range east of Missoula. The larvae of the budworm feed inside the buds and new needles of trees. The resultant defoliation may damage the appearance of the tree sufficiently to prevent its use as a Christmas tree or to lower the grade of a salable tree.

Forest entomologists report no change from 1962 in the status of any of these insects and they see no areas where the insect threat is significantly lessening.

Damage by diseases to Christmas tree stock is usually secondary to that of insects. The most important disease--Rhabdocline needlecast (Christmas tree blight)--has been on the decline for the last 4 years. This disease causes the infected tree to lose the previous year's needles. Foresters found only scattered, light infections near Big Fork, Libby, Fortine, Rexford, and Troy, the areas where the disease is most severe. Forest pathologists point out, however, that the disease is probably cyclic in nature with periods of high and low infection, and that under the proper conditions infections of epidemic proportions may occur again.

Flathead County became the leading producer of Christmas trees in 1963, while Lincoln County dropped to second place. These two counties produced 84 percent of the trees exported from Montana, although their combined total production dropped 2 percent (42,000 trees) from their 1962 total.

Rail shipments of trees continued to decline, reaching the lowest level on record. These shipments were about 19 percent (309,000 trees) less than in 1962. Texas, Oklahoma, California, Missouri, and Kansas, the leading market states, accounted for 70 percent of all rail shipments. Truck shipments increased 25 percent (165,000 trees) over 1962 figures.

Table 1.--Shipments of Christmas trees by rail and truck from Montana, by counties, 1963

County	Rail shipments	Truck shipments	Total	Percent
	Thousands of trees			
Flathead	465	437	902	43
Lincoln	556	316	872	41
Lake	147	6	153	7
Sanders	76	30	106	5
Missoula	38	15	53	3
Other	5	14	19	1
Total	1,287	818	2,105	100

Table 2.--Rail and truck Christmas tree shipments from Montana, 1942-1963

Year	Rail shipments		Truck shipments		Total shipments
	Thousands of trees	Percent	Thousands of trees	Percent	Thousands of trees
1942	2,139	97	65	3	2,204
1943	2,931	94	172	6	3,103
1944	2,636	96	120	4	2,756
1945	2,556	94	168	6	2,724
1946	2,867	87	432	13	3,299
1947	2,210	88	306	12	2,516
1948	2,731	87	392	13	3,123
1949	2,817	86	440	14	3,257
1950	2,693	89	325	11	3,018
1951	2,784	90	301	10	3,085
1952	2,375	90	270	10	2,645
1953	2,389	79	631	21	3,020
1954	2,760	79	723	21	3,483
1955	2,855	88	380	12	3,235
1956	3,349	80	847	20	4,196
1957	2,631	71	1,089	29	3,720
1958	2,470	69	1,098	31	3,568
1959	2,741	73	1,010	27	3,751
1960	2,237	70	963	30	3,200
1961	1,662	69	730	31	2,392
1962	1,596	71	653	29	2,249
1963	1,287	61	818	39	2,105

Table 3.--Rail shipments of Montana Christmas trees to leading markets, 1963 and 1962

State	1963		State	1962	
	Thousands of trees	Percent		Thousands of trees	Percent
Texas	328	25	Texas	361	23
Oklahoma	171	13	Oklahoma	218	14
California	161	13	California	166	10
Missouri	128	10	Iowa	157	10
Kansas	114	9	Missouri	157	10
Iowa	109	8	Kansas	138	9
Nebraska	62	5	Nebraska	76	5
Louisiana	47	4	Oregon	52	3
Oregon	38	3	Illinois	48	3
Others	129	10	Others [1]	223	13
Total	1,287	100		1,596	100

[1] Includes 5,000 trees exported to Mexico.